Insofar as soybean is concerned, it is a micronutrient or a nutrient due to lack of which a large number of children and women are suffering, this discrimination is even worse here than in some of the sovereign African countries. Insofar as soybean production is concerned, in India the yield per hectare is only 868 kg. whereas the world average is 1832 kg.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI T.N. CHATURVEDI): Mr. Manoj Bhattacharya, please wind up. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRI MANOJ BHATTACHARYA: I am winding up. ...*(Interruptions)*... Please have some mercy. ...*(Interruptions)*... Let me at least put one or two points.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI T.N. CHATURVEDI): You are dilating on the points. ...*(Interruptions)*... I will be very happy...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRI MANOJ BHATTACHARYA: Please have some mercy. ...*(Interruptions)*... I have been waiting for all this while. ...*(Interruptions)*... If you are asking me to sit down, okay, I will sit down. ...*(Interruptions)*...

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI T.N. CHATURVEDI) : I am sorry ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRI MANOJ BHATTACHARYA: Thank you very much. ...*(Interruptions)*... I am concluding. ...*(Interruptions)*...

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI T.N. CHATURVEDI): If it is so, it my misfortune. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRI MANOJ BHATTACHARYA: It is my pleasure. ...*(Interruptions)*... I am sorry. ...*(Interruptions)*...

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI T.N. CHATURVEDI): The discussion on the Motion of Thanks on the President's Address is over. The hon. Prime Minister will reply to the debate on Monday, the 18th March.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

The incident at the Army Recruitment Rally at Lucknow on 14th March, 2002

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): Mr. Vice-Chairman, Sir, a recruitment rally had been scheduled in Lucknow Cantonment Area from 13th March, 2002 to 31st March, 2002. On 14th March, 2002, about 5,000 young men had assembled at the Cantonment

Area for the recruitment rally. At approximately 0600 hours over 100 of these young boys who had also come to participate in the recruitment rally, were sitting on the concrete roof of a sewage tank, waiting for the rally activities to begin.

Probably due to the overload, the sewage tank roof collapsed and several young men fell into the tank. Prompt rescue and relief operations were launched to save the victims. 21 dead bodies have been recovered. Three injured young men are under treatment in Command hospital.

The tragic incident triggered off mob violence by the large crowds which had gathered for the recruitment rally. Police reinforcements had to be rushed to the site to control the situation. A number of civil and army vehicles have been damaged by the mob. The situation had been controlled by the police and the mob had been dispersed from the cantonment area by afternoon. The mob had also damaged some civil vehicles in the civil area adjoining the cantonment.

Hon. Prime Minister has announced an ex-gratia relief of Rs.1 lakh each to the families of those who have died in this tragic incident. In addition, the Government of Uttar Pradesh has also announced an ex-gratia relief of Rs.1 lakh each to the families of those who have died, Rs.25,000 each to those who are severely injured and Rs.5000 each to those who have received minor injuries.

A Court of Inquiry has been ordered by the Central Command into this unfortunate incident.

As per the latest information received, the death toll of the tragic incident which occurred at the recruitment rally site in Lucknow Cantonment Area on 14th March, 2002, has reached 23. 3 more casualties which had been taken out from the tank and taken away to some local civil hospital were later reported by the civil administration. 2 persons out of these three causalities succumbed to injuries in the hospital; one person still remains in the civil hospital and is under medical treatment. Therefore, the total death toll has come to 23.

As per the information received the tragic incident had occurred at about 0555 hours on 14th March, 2002. Within about 5 to 10 minutes ambulances from Command and Base Hospitals had arrived on the scene of accident. One QRT Vehicle (Quick Recovery Transport) was also available on the rally site. Because of the immediate assistance which became

available the causalities from the tank were removed expeditiously and by about 0630 to 0640 hours, these casualties had been sent to the Command Hospital for treatment.

His Excellency, the Governor of Uttar Pradesh had visited the site of incident around 1730 hours on 14th March, 2002, and later also visited the Command Hospital and met the patients under treatment.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI T.N. CHATURVEDI): Mr. Kaushik and others have raised this point. All of them were deeply distressed and wanted a ***suo motu*** statement. But all of them are absent now.

श्री कलराज मिश्र (उत्तर प्रदेश) : महोदय, मैं इस संबंध में यह जरूर बताना चाहूंगा कि जो सूचना है कि 10 मिनट के अंदर ही एम्बुलेंस और बाकी सारी चीजें पहुंच गयीं, मेरी सूचना के हिसाब से वहां आधे घंटे के बाद ही ये सारे आए। अगर पहले पहुंच गए होते तो शायद कुछ और जानें बचायी जा सकती थीं। मैं यह जानना चाहता हूं कि जिस सीवेज टैंक के ध्वस्त होने के कारण यह दुर्घटना घटित हुई क्या उसके बारे में कि यह खराब है, ठीक नहीं है, इसको ठीक किया जाए, उस क्षेत्र के नागरिकों ने रक्षा मंत्रालय को पहले कोई ज्ञापन दिया था और उसको यह कहकर अमान्य कर दिया गया कि इसकी कोई जरूरत नहीं है? अगर यह भी जानकारी कर ली जाए तो ज्यादा अच्छा होगा। पूर्व सूचना देने के पश्चात भी नहीं हुआ तो किसके कारण नहीं हुआ, इसको भी देखा जाए तो ज्यादा उपयुक्त होगा।

SHRI SHANKAR ROY CHOWDHURY (West Bengal): Mr. Vice-Chairman, Sir, I would like to seek a couple of clarifications because our knowledge is based on media reports.

The first point, of course, as the hon. Member has said, is about the timing of the rescue operation.

The second point is, according to the media reports, there was some kind of a stampede, and about one hundred boys climbed over or were crossing over the sewage tank roof when the roof of the tank collapsed. If there is a big crowd, there is a possibility of stampede. When there is such a kind of recruitment, it is the custom that enough police are deployed. Did you deploy enough police there for controlling the crowd, in the event of a stampede, particularly in the area where it has occurred? This is not the first incident of its kind. There was another incident earlier where there was firing.

The third point is about the quality of the roof of the sewage tank. This is a new point which the hon. Member has raised. I would like to know from the hon. Minister as to what are the facts about it.

Sir, my last point, of course, is with regard to the timing of the relief. As per the media reports, the relief operations started only after two hours. What is the reason? Thank you.

SHRI S. VIDUTHALAI VIRUMBI (Tamil Nadu): Mr. Vice-Chairman, Sir, it is a lesson for us. It is not only here, but everywhere, due to unemployment, a large number of boys are coming whenever army/police selections are taking place. I take this opportunity to bring to the notice of this august House and also to the notice of the hon. Minister that the boys who come for selection are, actually, ill-treated. If you look at the recruitment site, you will find how are they being treated. They are being treated the way the students were treated by the teachers thirty years ago. Even now, the boys are being treated in the same way at the time of army recruitment. They are left with only one undergarment. They are made to stand for hours together on the ground, when they go through the tests. This is how the boys are being treated. I would like to know from the hon. Minister as to how many people actually fell in the tank. Whether it is a fact that within 40-45 minutes, we were able to retrieve all the people who fell in the tank. If 'yes', how many boys we were able to rescue? There is no mention in the statement as to how many boys fell in the tank and how many people have, actually, been rescued. I would also like to know from the hon. Minister whether it is true that after treatment, the boys became all right. There is no such information in the statement. I request the hon. Minister to furnish the information.

Finally, coming to the point relating to the timing of rescue operations, I would like to submit that media reports does not say that you were able to complete the rescue operations within 45 minutes. Here, either the media is wrong or the statement is incorrect. On this point also, I need a clarification from the hon. Minister.

SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES: Sir, my submission is based on the information that I have received from the local Army Command and also from the State Government. I have also read the media reports. One newspaper has reported that thirty-six boys were killed in this incident, and other newspapers put the figures differently, coming down to twenty-one. But, as far as I am concerned, these are the figures which are authentic, which have been put out by the Army Command in Lucknow, and the State Government. We have appointed a Court of Inquiry, and if there are other points of view, either from the media or by eyewitnesses or by those who have survived the tragedy, they can submit the same before the Inquiry

Committee. All these facts will, certainly, be brought out. Normally, the Court of Inquiry does not take much time to find the facts and present them to the people and to the authorities concerned. Therefore, I would not want to go into the 'figures controversy.' The fact that the ambulances reached there within minutes is also a part of the information that was passed on to me, and I have no reasons to disbelieve that information. To the people who are witness to that, the information has also been made available that it took half-an-hour to reach there. This will also come in when the Court of Inquiry completes its investigation.

Shri Mishraji has made a point about the complaint to the Ministry of Defence sometime back that the roof of this septic tank was not in good condition and it needed repairs. This was a concrete roof. There was no reason for any one to go to that place and find out whether the roof was in proper shape. This particular septic tank belongs to a housing colony which is inhabited by the army engineers. It is a fairly old structure. But, there is no reason for anyone to go and sit on that tank at any point of time. If anyone had any idea about the exact condition of the roof or the cover of the tank and if the roof were in bad condition, he would have had made a report to the army establishment at the cantonment. This matter would not come to the Ministry of Defence. As far as my knowledge on the functioning of the Ministry goes, the condition of the septic tanks and the housing accommodation of the army personnel would never come to the Ministry of Defence.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI T.N. CHATURVEDI): The facts may come out after the Court of Inquiry is over.

SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES: They will also come out in the Court of Inquiry.

Sir, a point has been raised by Shri Shankar Roy Chowdhury. I do not have any information on stampede. The information that I have indicates that these young men chose to go and sit on that; perhaps, that gave them advantage point. Whether they were all part of the boys who came there for recruitment in the army or whether they were accompanying the boys who came for recruitment or they came to see how the army conducts its recruitment drive; one does not know. This was a programme which was to begin on the 13th and did begin on the 13th. There was no incident of any kind on the 13th; it was to go up to 31st March, 2002. So, it was almost a three-week-long programme that had been planned, and all

that I can say is, this was a very, very unfortunate tragedy. We did all that we could do to the best of our ability. Thank you.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI T.N. CHATURVEDI): The House stands adjourned till 11 a.m. on Monday, the 18th March, 2002.

The House then adjourned at seven of the clock till

eleven of the clock on Monday, the 18th March, 2002.

MGIP(PLU)MRND—1662RS—21.09.2002.